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Y. P. SINHA

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2. NOTES ON BARKING DEER, *MUNTIACUS* *MUNTJAK* (ZIMMERMANN)

In the July-August issue (1967) of *Hornbill* Newsletter some comments on the coloration of newly born barking deer aroused my interest and brought back to mind some observations of nearly fifty years ago! In the distant past I frequently observed and collected barking deer in several parts of India and frequently kept them as pets.

In the Western Ghats my observation go back many years, in the Naga Hills, Assam and Northern Burma (Chindwin Expedition, 1935), the base of the Himalayas and in some areas of southern India my observations were more restricted in time.

Normally, the Muntjac is a solitary animal for the greater part of the year, both by day and by night, but the sexes come together for a short interval during the breeding season. I have seen family

parties composed of a pair of adults with one, rarely two, young (one young at a birth appears to be more normal) moving round together. While in Burma in 1935 I shot a specimen in January (1935) at Nanyasaik which, I discovered later, contained a well advanced foetus. A couple of days later I secured a fine male with excellent antlers for Burma—I believe, just short of the record head. At the time I was sitting under a fruiting Banyan Tree (*Ficus bengalensis*) waiting for specimen to 'turn up', this method I always found the most profitable when collecting specimens whether mammals or birds when time was available instead of crashing through the jungle.

Barking Deer appear to be more crepuscular or even nocturnal in their habits, seldom moving round during the day unless disturbed. When on the prowl, for specimen at night with a powerful electric headlight, I have frequently put them up in the beam of the torch, their eyes glowing like large rubies. For a time they would stare, inquisitively, trying to discover the source of light, then, with a sudden loud bark dash away—warning the whole neighbourhood. On occasion the animals would just slink away noiselessly and vanish into the darkness. In addition to the well-known bark Muntjac produce a faint, but distinct whistle, like some other deer do; lastly, there is the controversial 'clicking' sound which some observers suggest is produced by the canine teeth; my own belief is that this last sound is made by the tongue on the palate for I have heard it made by captive animals when I have been quite near, the jaws were not moved at the time the sound was uttered, however, the point still needs further investigation and observation.

I have had many young Muntjac brought to me by villagers and also caught by the 'Kathkaris' when out with them hunting—young of all ages, but never have I seen spotted young. The large foetus obtained during the Chindwin Expedition is probably available and could be examined. Young deer and antelope are frequently very difficult to determine and could, at times, be easily confused, particularly when secured in the absence of the adults.

Spotting, as is well-known, is a disruptive colouring and occurs under varied conditions in adults or young (or both) of many species which inhabit the spangled light of open jungle or dense grass country. The behaviour of animals displaying such patterns is generally in keeping with their colouring—'sudden freezing' when alarmed. However, camouflage is a complex subject and I do not propose to discuss it at length here—it is best understood by those who have experienced it and understood the biotics of the animals so protected.

However, it must be remembered that the Muntjac and the Four-horned antelope (*Tetraceros*) frequently border one another's terrain

and the identity of the young presents a problem. Likewise the muntjac and chital frequently become close neighbours and here again the uninitiated could frequently confuse the young in the absence of the parents.

The Muntjac also inhabits the same terrain as the Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*): in both these animals, as far as my own experience goes the newly born are not spotted. However, the young of these two could not possibly be confused because of size and texture of hair. Spotting in dense forest dwellers would tend to endanger the young and expose them more readily to predators. Without labouring the subject any further, I believe that the newly born young of the Muntjac are *unspotted*. I have not observed anything to the contrary. The photograph of two young taken at Khandala, W. Ghats in May of 1918 supports my view the young are immaculate at birth in the W. Ghats.

8, KIWI STREET,
HERETAUNGA,
NEW ZEALAND,
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CHARLES McCANN

3. THE NILGIRI TAHR, *HEMITRAGUS* *HYLOCRIUS* OGILBY

(With two plates)

The Nilgiri Tahr is found in the high hill ranges of south India, the main area being the Nilgiris, Anaimalais, and the Western Ghats south to Cape Comorin, at elevations of 4,000-8,000 feet. In the Nilgiris they are now more or less confined to the south-west edge of the Kundahs from Sispara Pass along the edge of the escarpment north to Mukurti and Nilgiri Peaks.

Here an almost sheer cliff drops 2,000-3,000 feet down from the plateau of rolling grass covered hills to the thick jungle clad valleys below. In the early morning small herds of Tahr numbering anything up to twenty, may be found grazing on the grassy slopes at the edge of the escarpment, and if left undisturbed may lie up on these hills throughout the day and continue feeding again in the late afternoon. However, if they are disturbed they will quickly move over the edge of the escarpment, scrambling and leaping down the steep gullies to lie up on some sheltered ledge below. In areas where